CUSTOMER AND COMMUNITY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

22 October 2013

*Councillor Terence Patrick – Chairman
*Councillor Pauline Searle – Vice-Chairman

*Councillor Melanie Bright
*Councillor Adrian Chandler
Councillor Steve Freeman
*Councillor Angela Gunning
Councillor Jayne Hewlett
*Councillor Philip Hooper
Mrs Stella Howarth
*Councillor Jennifer Jordan

*Councillor Julia McShane
Mr Mike Parsons
Councillor Tony Phillips
*Councillor Iseult Roche
*Councillor Neil Ward
*Councillor Jenny Wicks

*Present

Councillors Richard Billington, Lead Councillor for Community Safety and Health, Sarah Creedy, Lead Councillor for Housing and Social Welfare, Matt Furniss, Lead Councillor for Environment and Mrs Jennifer Powell, Lead Councillor for Tourism were in attendance.

In accordance with Council Procedure Rule 17(m), Councillors Nikki Nelson-Smith and Caroline Reeves attended as substitutes for Councillors Jayne Hewlett and Tony Phillips respectively.

CC26 – APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND NOTIFICATION OF SUBSTITUTES

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Steve Freeman, Jayne Hewlett and Tony Phillips. The Committee was advised of the substitutions as detailed above.

CC27 – LOCAL CODE OF CONDUCT – DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS

The following councillors declared their non-pecuniary interests as detailed below.

In relation to Minute CC34, Review of grants to voluntary and community organisations:

Councillor Terence Patrick: In relation to the Vivace Chorus, Councillor Patrick organised the Mayor’s Carol Concert with the Chorus.

Councillor Pauline Searle: In relation to Disability Challengers, Councillor Searle was a trustee of the organisation.

CC28 – MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting of the Customer and Community Scrutiny Committee held on 10 September 2013 were confirmed and signed.

At its last meeting on 10 September 2013, the Committee approved the minutes of 9 July 2013, however, subsequently it had been noted that there was an omission in these minutes. Therefore, the Committee agreed the amendment to the minutes of 9 July 2013 as follows:
CC13A – The minutes of the meeting of the Customer and Community Scrutiny Committee held on 14 May 2013 were confirmed and signed.

CC29 – WHEY AHEAD NEWSLETTER ITEMS – COUNCILLOR QUESTIONS
No questions were received.

CC30 – URGENT ITEM – LOCAL COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT SCHEME
The Committee received a presentation from Steve White, Head of Revenue and Payments Services and Gordon Walker, Benefits Manager on the options for changes to the Local Council Tax Support Scheme (LCTSS) for 2014-15. The changes would generate additional financial savings following the government’s decision to reduce the amount of money made available to support those with a liability for council tax.

The draft scheme for 2014-15 would replace the Surrey Framework approved last year with the government’s default scheme with local amendments, but retain the five micro saving elements that featured in the Framework.

The Committee noted that the Executive, at its meeting on 3 October 2013, had agreed to consult with interested parties on the revised scheme which included the following savings options for 2014-15.

1. The 2013-14 scheme restricted support for claimants living in band E, F, G and H properties to the liability of a band D council tax. Officers had proposed that for 2014-15, the restriction remains for properties in band E, but to withdraw support completely for higher banded properties. Officers had estimated that this option would result in savings of approximately £74,000 and would affect 60 to 70 claimants.

2. Officers also proposed to increase the minimum amount of council tax support from £5 per week to £10 per week. This option would result in savings of approximately £101,000 and would affect 363 claimants. Although the aggregate saving arising from options 1 and 2 was £175,000, some households would be affected by both options which meant that the combined savings would total approximately £155,000.

The Committee noted that pensioners, as defined by the age at which a person could apply for pension credit, would be exempt from the changes. However, the Committee expressed concern that the changes would still present some difficulties for households. However, the continuation of a hardship fund for 2014-15 would support those suffering severe financial strain on their household budgets.

The Committee thanked officers for their presentation and were pleased to note that a report assessing the impact of the welfare changes ‘one year on’, was scheduled to be considered by the Corporate Improvement Scrutiny Committee in July 2014, which would allow scrutiny to fully evaluate the impact of the changes.

Note: By reason of the special circumstances described below, the chairman considered that this item should be dealt with at this meeting as a matter of urgency pursuant to Section 100B 4(b) of the Local Government Act 1972.

Special Circumstances: In order to allow the scrutiny committee to consider the implications of the changes to the Local Council Tax Support Scheme (LCTSS) during the
consultation period, given the tight deadlines imposed on the Council to comply with government legislation to review its LCTSS and implement any changes from 1 April 2014.

CC30 – OPERATION OF LEISURE MANAGEMENT CONTRACT
The Committee received a presentation from Steve May and Ivan Horsfall-Turner of Freedom Leisure, detailing the performance of Guildford Spectrum, Guildford Lido and Ash Manor Sports Centre for the period 1 April 2012 to 31 March 2013. The Lead Councillor for Tourism and the Lead Councillor for Environment welcomed the report and reiterated the value of the positive relationship between Freedom Leisure and Jonathan Sewell, Business Development Manager for the Council.

Questions from the Committee raised a number of issues and points of information as summarised below:

- The replacement of the current Combined Heat and Power (CHP) Unit at the Spectrum would lead to significant savings for the Council. The Committee noted that, due to a breakdown, the current CHP had been recently out of operation for a period of 6-8 weeks. The installation of a new CHP would offer greater efficiency and contribute a greater percentage towards Spectrum’s overall energy usage.
- The current catering arrangements were not meeting customer expectations. Freedom Leisure advised that the current caterer had been given notice and the catering contract was currently out to tender.
- The cleanliness of the pool changing rooms had been highlighted as a cause of complaint in recent months. The Committee was pleased to note that the refurbishment of the changing rooms had lead to a reduction in such complaints. In the most part complaints were now in relation to the lack of provision of changing rooms at peak times.
- In relation to the Lido, whilst Freedom Leisure recognised that during the summer months residents may wish to use the pool later in the evening, it was important to balance this with the requirements of the users who regularly hire the pool in the evening whatever the weather.
- Reinvestment in the facilities over the first few years of the contract, would realistically mean that a surplus was unlikely to be achieved. However, the Committee noted that Freedom Leisure had paid a management fee of £906,814 for 2012-13 to the Council. This annual fee was indexed linked over the 10 years of the contract.
- Councillors expressed concern regarding the prices of some activities at the Spectrum. Freedom Leisure confirmed that there had been no significant change in programming and price increases had been in line with inflation or remained static or decreased where demand indicated that was the most sensible approach.
- The Committee highlighted inconsistencies in the methods of calculating customer satisfaction survey results. Freedom Leisure advised that they were currently looking at developing key performance indicators.
- The Committee noted that Freedom Leisure followed a robust procedure to address accidents. As an example the Leisure Pool tiling had recently been upgraded to an anti-slip surface given a trend in accidents in that area.

The Committee reassessed and endorsed the objectives of the Leisure Partnership Agreement as set out below:

- to improve the health and well being of their communities through increased participation
to use sport and leisure to bring communities together
• to enable access to services by specific groups with identified needs
• to encourage and provide affordable and sustainable local facilities and services
• to explore partnerships with other organisations where these will benefit the community
• to work with clubs and voluntary organisations in the borough to develop their activities and skill levels
• to encourage investment in the facilities to maintain and enhance the quality of service
• to bear in mind the rights, needs and aspirations of facility users and staff
• to demonstrate value for money and continuous improvement
• to recognise and maximise commercial opportunities in the facilities
• to improve the financial ‘bottom line’ of the Council.

In terms of the format of the annual report, the Committee suggested that in future years, the report should clearly link to the objectives of the Leisure Partnership Agreement.

The Committee,

RESOLVED: That the Executive be advised that this Committee was satisfied with the performance of Freedom Leisure for 2012-13 and endorsed the objectives of the Leisure Partnership Agreement, as set out above.

**CC31 – REVIEW OF CLOSED CIRCUIT TELEVISION (CCTV)**

The Lead Councillor for Community Safety and Health introduced the report which proposed a comprehensive scope for the review of closed circuit television (CCTV). The system was owned by Guildford Borough Council and run by Surrey Police from the control room at Guildford Police Station.

A number of councillors had visited the CCTV control room over the past two months and highlighted the need to review the current maintenance of the CCTV system, for which the Council was responsible. The previous maintenance contract had been terminated and the contract was currently out to tender.

The Committee expressed concern that there were a number of cameras requiring maintenance and repair and that this should be resolved prior to Christmas. The Committee was pleased to note that a comprehensive list of repairs had been prepared and would be dealt with by way of a one-off contract to ensure that the system was working satisfactorily prior to Christmas.

Having noted the comprehensive scope of the review, the Committee,

RESOLVED: That a report on the emerging draft recommendations of the service review of CCTV be scheduled for the Customer and Community Scrutiny Committee meeting on 16 January 2014.

**CC32 – INTERIM HOUSING STRATEGY STATEMENT: PROGRESS REPORT**

The Lead Councillor for Housing and Social Welfare, Head of Housing Advice Services and Housing Development Manager, introduced the report which updated the Committee on the
progress against the Interim Housing Strategy Statement Action Plan published in March 2011. The report proposed a revised timetable for the new housing strategy, put forward an updated action plan, provided information on potential future delivery of new build affordable housing and updated guidance on a suggested affordable rent level in the borough.

Questions from the Committee raised a number of issues and points of information as summarised below:

- The new housing strategy will link closely with the Local Plan. The aim was to publish the strategy in late 2014 early 2015 once the issues with the Local Plan had been resolved.
- The case for a Guildford Affordable Rent proposed at 70 per cent of a market rent or the Local Housing Allowance whichever was the lower was discussed. There was general support from the Committee for a Guildford Affordable Rent.
- The process for bringing an empty property back into use was complicated and time consuming. Whilst the Council had recently achieved the first successful Empty Dwelling Management (EDMO), most properties that were empty were often larger properties and too big for housing applicants. In terms of housing needs, two bedroom properties were the most in demand.
- Whilst an assessment of the condition of Council’s shared ownership properties had not yet been undertaken, it was the intention to do so within the forthcoming year.

Having considered the report, the Committee

RESOLVED: The Executive be advised that this Committee endorse the Interim Housing Strategy Statement, updated action plan and introduction of a Guildford Affordable Rent as set out in the report.

CC33 – REVIEW OF GRANTS TO VOLUNTARY AND COMMUNITY ORGANISATIONS
The Lead Councillor for Housing and Social Welfare introduced the current review of grants to voluntary and community organisations, making clear that the intention was not to reduce the overall amount of funding available for community grants but to ensure that the grants were focussed and supported the new corporate priorities approved by the Council on 10 October 2013.

Since the Committee considered the scope of the review at its meeting on 10 September 2013, all past grant recipients and relevant third sector organisations had been advised of the review and the responses received were summarised for the Committee.

The Committee noted the broad recommendations of the review, as follows:

Community Grants Scheme: This would be established by merging some existing grants budgets and discontinuing a number of automatic annual grants given to various organisations. The resulting budget was around £132,000.

Commissioning Grants: As part of the review it had become clear that many payments to external organisations were not discretionary grants. These payments supported on-going running costs and were made to commission services from relevant third sector organisations. The proposal was that these commissioning grants should be incorporated into the service budgets and be subject to a funding agreement and a formal evaluation process monitored by the Head of Service.
**Partnership Schemes:** The Guildford and Waverley Voluntary Grants panel was a partnership scheme attracting match-funding from Surrey County Council. There were no changes proposed to this scheme.

**Yvonne Arnaud Theatre:** The Council had agreed to provide grant funding of £310,220 to the Yvonne Arnaud Theatre in the current financial year and next. The continuation of this level of grant was not considered to be appropriate and the Council would work with the Theatre to continue providing tapering support, with a view to it becoming more self-sustaining.

In response to questions from the Committee, the Officers confirmed that as with all organisations, arts organisations would be encouraged to submit applications under the new community grants scheme for projects that supported the Council’s corporate priorities.

Subject to the scheme being approved by the Executive at its meeting on 5 December 2013, this Committee requested a report following the first round of grant funding with the new system reviewing the outcomes.

The Committee

RESOLVED: That, subject to the scheme being approved by the Executive, a report on the outcome of the first round of grant funding under the new system be submitted to this Committee in due course.